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FR. JOE A MANITOBBAN MISSIONARY



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VERITAS

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FATHER JOE A MANITOBAN MISSIONARY

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VERITAS

FATHER JOE —

A MANITOBAN

MISSIONARY

A priest's work varies according to the place and the times in which he lives. When Father Kręciszewski began his ministry in Manitoba about forty years ago, it was the era of the kerosene lamp and of dirt roads. His missionary work did not differ essentially from the work of the priests who preceded him, except by the greater zeal which impelled him. His apostolate embraced a wider field because of the diversity of his talents and interests. Otherwise, many Polish priests in Manitoba — and in Canada — will recognize their own conditions of work in this review of the ministry of Father Joe.

When he became aware of his vocation, he followed it resolutely, although it meant leaving a comfortable home and going into an unknown land, which had nothing to commend it but the need for priests. Canada is an unknown country to the majority of Americans even today; but in 1921, it was a mysterious land for the young priest from Buffalo. He nevertheless chose it as the field of his endeavors.

„The qualities which distinguished the missionary life of Father Kręciszewski were not apparent when he first set foot on Manitoba soil. A glance at this unassuming young clergyman, as he stepped from the train in Winnipeg, rather awakened sympathy than any hope that he would endure for long the rigors of the Manitoban missions. He was handsome, of slight build, slow and deliberate of movement, with a twinkle of kindness and good humor in his eyes, which were to delight his friends all his life. When he spoke, his voice was surprisingly deep for

(Continued on back flap)



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FATHER JOE —
A MANITOBAN MISSIONARY



Father Ladislaus Joseph Kręciszewski

FATHER JOE — A MANITOBAN MISSIONARY

A BIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE
OF FATHER LADISLAUS JOSEPH
KRĘCISZEWSKI

by
EDWARD M. HUBICZ

with a preface by
RIGHT REVEREND J. E. CAHILL, P.D.,
Rector of St. Mary's Cathedral, Winnipeg



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The photograph of Father Kręciszewski is reproduced by courtesy of the Ritz
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*To the Memory of
Father Adalbert Kulawy, O. M. I.,
first Polish missionary in Manitoba,
and
to the one hundred Polish priests who have
worked in Manitoba since 1898*

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PREFACE

PREOCCUPIED AS WE ARE today with the material progress which influences every phase of our lives, we are apt to forget the plight of the pioneers and the problems which confronted them a few decades ago in Manitoba. It is heartening, therefore, to find one of our priests, who is a link between the past and the present, with the vision to record what might otherwise be forgotten, concerning the missions and the missionaries of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg from its very inception.

At the first Clergy Retreat in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg in 1918, there were twenty-five priests in attendance. To them and their religious associates was entrusted the care of souls in a territory which embraced 44,778 square miles of prairie, wilderness.

PREFACE

muskeg and water. At that time, there were no all-weather roads, and the means of transportation were very precarious. This meant isolation for the people, and hardships for the priests whose duty it was to minister to them.

The first problem of the newly appointed Archbishop of Winnipeg was to recruit priests who were mission-minded, for none but these could persevere under circumstances of poverty, hardship, loneliness and discouragement such as prevailed at that time in most of the Western Missions.

Among the first recruits was Father Ladislaus Joseph Kręciszewski who came from the well established Diocese of Buffalo, where he was highly esteemed and where his career in the Church was one of high promise. He was not lured here by any of the attractions which most men hold dear; he came well apprised of the situation, and well determined to measure up to its needs.

That "Father Joe", as he came to be known by priests and laymen alike, succeeded where so many others failed, is due to the extraordinary qualities of soul, mind and body which he possessed. *Poverty* is a relative term. Father Joe solved that problem by limiting his needs to the resources available, and by becoming one of the best "do-it-yourself" priests the prairies have ever known. *Hardship* like poverty,

is relative. What would kill or incapacitate the ordinary priest seemed to challenge Father Joe to greater efforts. *Loneliness* is not unlike a vacuum. Where it exists there is nothing to occupy the heart, the head or the hand. Father Joe could never be lonely because he was one of the most versatile priests to come out of the East. In his great heart was an ever increasing love for souls; in the keen mind of this scholar was an ever increasing quest for the means to communicate his varied knowledge to the learned and the unlearned, to the cultured and the uncultured, to the rich and the poor alike; and in the hands of this gifted priest, mechanical and allied problems were mastered with conspicuous ease. *Discouragement* besets only those who are prone to failure, and Father Joe was never a failure. It seems that God blessed his every project, though at times their merit and worth were not immediately apparent to those whose duty it was to appraise and encourage.

Father Kręciszewski's mission was to his compatriots, Catholics of Polish origin. However, to his eternal credit let it be said that he would have been welcomed as the pastor of any English-speaking parish in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg. His was the heart of Christ, and all men were his prospects. It is not surprising then that when he died, every priest and thousands of the laity of many national origins

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uttered but one and the same cry of regret: "The Archdiocese has lost a great priest" — and a score of priests could add: "and I, my best friend".

Rt. Rev. J. E. Cahill
Rector of St. Mary's Cathedral,
Winnipeg.

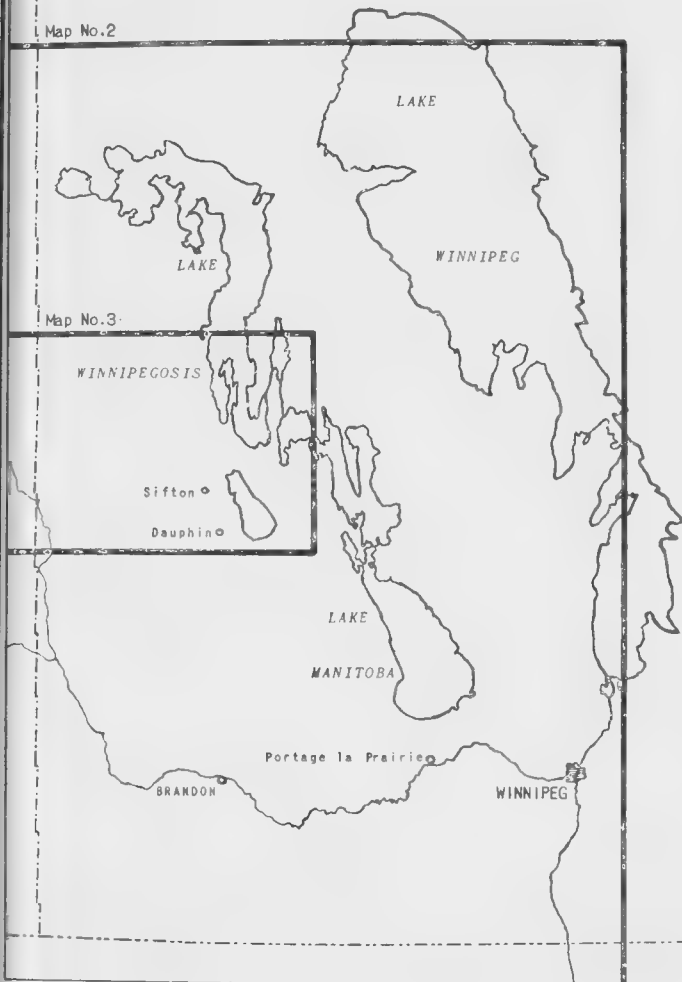
Map No. 1

The insets show the areas of maps 2 and 3



M A N I T O B A

Map No. 2



INTRODUCTION

URGED BY FRIENDS OF THE late Very Reverend L. J. Kręciszewski, I have reluctantly taken up the task of setting down this rough biographical account of a life which in many ways surpasses the ordinary. That these notes will not do justice to a man whose life was so colorful, so complex, so human, gives rise to the hope that some day an expert pen will retrace this hazy picture and fill out this sketchy outline. In the meantime, I implore the indulgence of the reader.

The aim of this study is not so much a detailed description of this unusual personality, but rather a record of the work of a country pastor and a scholar whose aptitudes and talents far exceeded the ordinary demands of his daily duties. It is hoped that from

INTRODUCTION

the incredible miscellany of the work related in these pages, the stature of the man will emerge.

His true measure is hard to take, for he seemed always to be beyond the pattern which we use to evaluate men. A Scripture scholar with degrees from a Roman university, who spends hours on a scaffolding working with a hammer, a paint-brush or a trowel. has an uncommon respect for manual labor. A priest who on the occasion of the anniversary of his ordination refuses a gift from his people, but himself makes a substantial offering to his Archbishop, has an unusual concept of generosity. Such a man does not fit the common pattern.

The division of this study into two parts was dictated by the circumstance of the places where Father Kręciszewski spent his thirty-one years of priesthood. For the first fourteen years he moved about in widely separate places, while the second half of his life as a priest, his ministry was confined to a small rural parish at Sifton. Never were his activities or his influence restricted by the boundaries of his parish.

It is mere chance that my acquaintance with Father Kręciszewski coincided roughly with the years of his Sifton pastorate. I have therefore been able to draw on personal knowledge and recollections in relating his work of those years. While for the first years of his priesthood, ample information was found

in the files of the *Gazeta Katolicka* and the *North-west Review*, and in documents in the Archives of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg. Moreover the observations of priests who knew Father Kręciszewski more intimately than I, have proved of invaluable help.

If this little work serves no other purpose but to keep alive the memory of a kindly priest who had the spirit of an apostle, my halting efforts will have been well repaid. If it is also accepted as a tribute — inadequate as it is — to the American priests of Polish origin, who have worked for the Poles in Manitoba, I shall be grateful. Should however, the life described in these pages inspire some young man to answer the call of God, and to take up the work of the Church in Manitoba, the credit would in nowise be mine.

I cannot offer this account of the life of Father Kręciszewski to his friends, without expressing my gratitude to those who have shown interest in my efforts. The kindness of His Grace, Archbishop Pocock, of Monsignor J. E. Cahill and of the members of the *Association of Polish Priests of Manitoba*, has given me no little encouragement. Particularly am I grateful to Father Lucien Sociński for his practical suggestions which have helped to bring this work to its present form.

Gimli, Manitoba,
March 7, 1958.

E. M. H.

P A R T I: 1921—1935

“Zelus domus tuae comedit me”.

Ps. 68, v. 10

I — MANITOBA MISSIONS IN 1921

LONG BEFORE THE SALUTARY influence of this modest priest reached into my life, I heard his name mentioned with the greatest respect in our home. A year before making his acquaintance, our paths touched momentarily under circumstances which were peculiar. It was the summer of 1938, at St. John Cantius in Winnipeg which was my parish church.

As a sub-deacon home on my holidays, I had remained in church after Mass on a weekday. The people had already left. Some one at the organ was playing, meditatively and reverently, variations on motifs from the *Overture to William Tell*. I later learned it was Father Kręciszewski.

I relate this trivial incident, for as I later had occasion to observe, it was typical of Father Kręci-

szewski. His life was full of actions which at first sight seemed strange and unexpected, but which on closer examination, were found to be turned to the glory of God. To whatever he put his hand, whether it was playing the organ, writing an article or mixing concrete, there seemed a deeper and hidden purpose for it, a spiritual motive.

Our first meeting occurred in 1939, in the sacristy of the parish church, shortly after my ordination to the priesthood. After Mass, a priest, as yet unknown to me, came to congratulate me on my recent ordination. Rather shyly, as it seemed to me, he asked for my blessing. As I now recall how closely he eyed me, I suspect he was sizing me up. Less than a month later I was appointed his assistant at Sifton.

Sifton, in 1939, was not a comely place. But in 1921, when the young Father Kręciszewski came to Manitoba as a missionary, most of the missions where a Polish diocesan priest could serve were unattractive. They were still in their primitive pioneer state. The sixteen thousand Poles in Manitoba had forty-four churches and chapels¹. Of these ten were located in the Archdiocese of St. Boniface, and were cared for by the Polish Oblate Fathers. The thirty-four others, scattered throughout the Archdiocese of Winnipeg, were served by four diocesan priests, one Redemptorist Father and three or four Polish Oblates.

The Holy Ghost parish, the oldest and largest

Polish parish in Manitoba, was in charge of the Oblate Fathers. Father Joseph Solski was pastor of St. John Cantius Church, and he willingly visited whatever Polish rural mission called on his services. Father Anthony Pluciński was at Polonia, then known as Huns Valley. The Oakburn parish and district were in the care of Father Alexander Korwin-Szymanowski², and the Sifton church with its brood of missions was served by Father Francis Stroński.

It can readily be appreciated that in 1921 "the need (for Polish priests in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg) was great and immediate", as Archbishop Sinnott expressed it to Bishop Turner of Buffalo, New York³. Polish immigrants were settling in the recently erected Archdiocese in such numbers, that Archbishop Sinnott was at a loss to find priests enough who spoke their language.

A Polish priest served not only his own parish church but as many mission chapels as he could visit. This lack of priests in the early period of the settlement of the Poles in Manitoba resulted in a weakening of the Faith which is still felt today.

The poverty of these mission chapels was incredible. Small, roughly finished, often unpainted, poorly furnished, they were still in their original condition. This is not surprising, as most of them were built to fill an immediate need, and seemed temporary in construction. Except in the Huns Valley and in

the Brokenhead districts, the Polish immigrants who erected these chapels had arrived in Manitoba only ten or fifteen years previously. They were poor, simple settlers, and the urgency of hacking out a farm in the wilderness and setting up homes in this new land left them little time or resources to build permanent churches. They therefore built the chapels — as they built their own homes — with logs, and furnished them as best they could with what money could be collected in their settlement. The chapels reflected the condition of their homes. It would take years to improve these little churches and to bring them to the neat appearance in which most of them stand today.

In 1921, the means of travel were likewise primitive. Roads as we know them today did not exist. The missionary — if he owned a car — travelled over roads that were nothing more than wagon-trails. If he made his trips by train, the last lap of the journey would be by wagon or sleigh, depending on the season of the year. Manitoba was missionary territory. A Polish priest who took up the work of the Church in Manitoba at that period could look forward to a life replete with hardships and sacrifices.

What a fertile field for a missionary, these thousands of Poles who had begun to move into the province in a steady stream since 1897!

2 — THE YOUNG MISSIONARY (1897 to 1921)

IN 1897, ON OCTOBER 16, IN Buffalo, New York, a fifth child was born to John Kręciszewski and Frances Łowicka. Eight days later the infant boy was baptized in the Church of the Transfiguration, and given the name Ladislaus.

His parents were immigrants who had arrived from Poland in 1891, and settled in the city of Buffalo. They were deeply religious, and their love of God permeated their family life. When Ladislaus was five years old, his mother died, giving birth to a seventh child. His father, a painter by trade and a musician in his spare time, begged his sister, then living in Poland, to come and take care of the seven orphaned children. It was she who brought up the family, showing them all the devotion and love of a mother.

Religious vocations blossomed in the Catholic atmosphere of this home. Two of the girls entered the convent and became Felician Sisters⁴, while one of their brothers, Francis, began his studies for the priesthood at the Polish Seminary at Orchard Lake in Detroit. His accidental death by drowning while in the seminary, seems to have been the occasion when his brother Ladislaus first became aware of his call to the priesthood. He answered that call resolutely.

Ladislaus Kręciszewski received his elementary schooling at St. Adalbert's Parish School, and his High School education at Canisius High School in Buffalo. He continued his studies at Canisius College where he obtained his degree of Bachelor of Arts, and went on to the Seminary at Niagara. He was an above-average student, and his ability became more apparent as he advanced in his studies.

It was in the latter years at the seminary that he resolved to go to Canada as a missionary to the Polish people.

By a devious way did Divine Providence lead Ladislaus Kręciszewski to the work that would literally consume his life. It began with the visit of one of his classmates to Buffalo. On the train this seminarian met a stranger who seemed surprisingly well-informed on the state of the Polish missions in

Manitoba. The stranger recounted to the seminarian in vivid detail the difficult conditions under which the few Polish priests were working in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg. He told him of the infrequent visits which some of the settlements were receiving due to a lack of Polish priests, of the hardships the priests had to endure, of the poverty of the people, and of other adverse conditions of the ministry.

When the student returned to the seminary, not being of Polish descent, he told his Polish confreres, Ignatius Zielonka, Ladislaus Kręciszewski and Walter Urbanik, of his encounter with the stranger and of all that he learned. The story fired the zeal of the three Poles, and one after another they decided to go to the missions of Manitoba.

When Ladislaus revealed his intention to his aunt, she begged him not to leave Buffalo. But her numerous entreaties failed to alter his resolution.

He in turn had to plead repeatedly with his Bishop before finally receiving permission to follow his wish. Shortly before his ordination to the priesthood he wrote to Archbishop Sinnott, in whose diocese he would work: "I am living on the hope that the near future will see me in your diocese, putting all my efforts to the propagation of greater fervor of faith among the Polish people"⁵. He received the highest commendation from the Rector of the Semi-

nary, who testified that "he has exceptional ability"⁶. While Bishop Turner assures Archbishop Sinnott that: "he has an excellent record at the Seminary. I feel that in releasing him, I am letting a very good student leave the diocese"⁷.

As might be expected, Archbishop Sinnott was overjoyed at receiving this promising student, more so since the two other Polish students were to come to Winnipeg with him.

The young deacon received the Sacrament of Holy Orders from the hands of Bishop Turner on November 5, 1921. Within two weeks the formalities of excardination from the Diocese of Buffalo and incardination into the Archdiocese of Winnipeg were completed. The way was open to the missions of Manitoba.

The day of the celebration of his first Mass, November 6, was a most consoling one for his father, his aunt, his family and his friends. It was surrounded with all the ceremony that Polish tradition dictates on so important an occasion. The pastor in company of a large gathering of parishioners went to the house of the newly-ordained priest to lead him in procession to the church. On entering the house, the pastor solemnly proclaimed: "We have come to take a son away from his father, and to give him to Holy Mother Church". It was the symbol of

a decisive moment: the priest had put his hand to the plough, and he was never to look back.

In the evening at the reception, Father Bentkowski, the assistant at the parish showed a delicate sense of humor. When he rose to congratulate the young levite, he drew from his pocket a worn piece of paper, and read a simple little 'speech'. It was the same 'speech' which Ladislaus when he was a school boy, had read to Father Bentskowski on the occasion of his ordination, fourteen years previously. The incident drew long and loud applause from the guests.

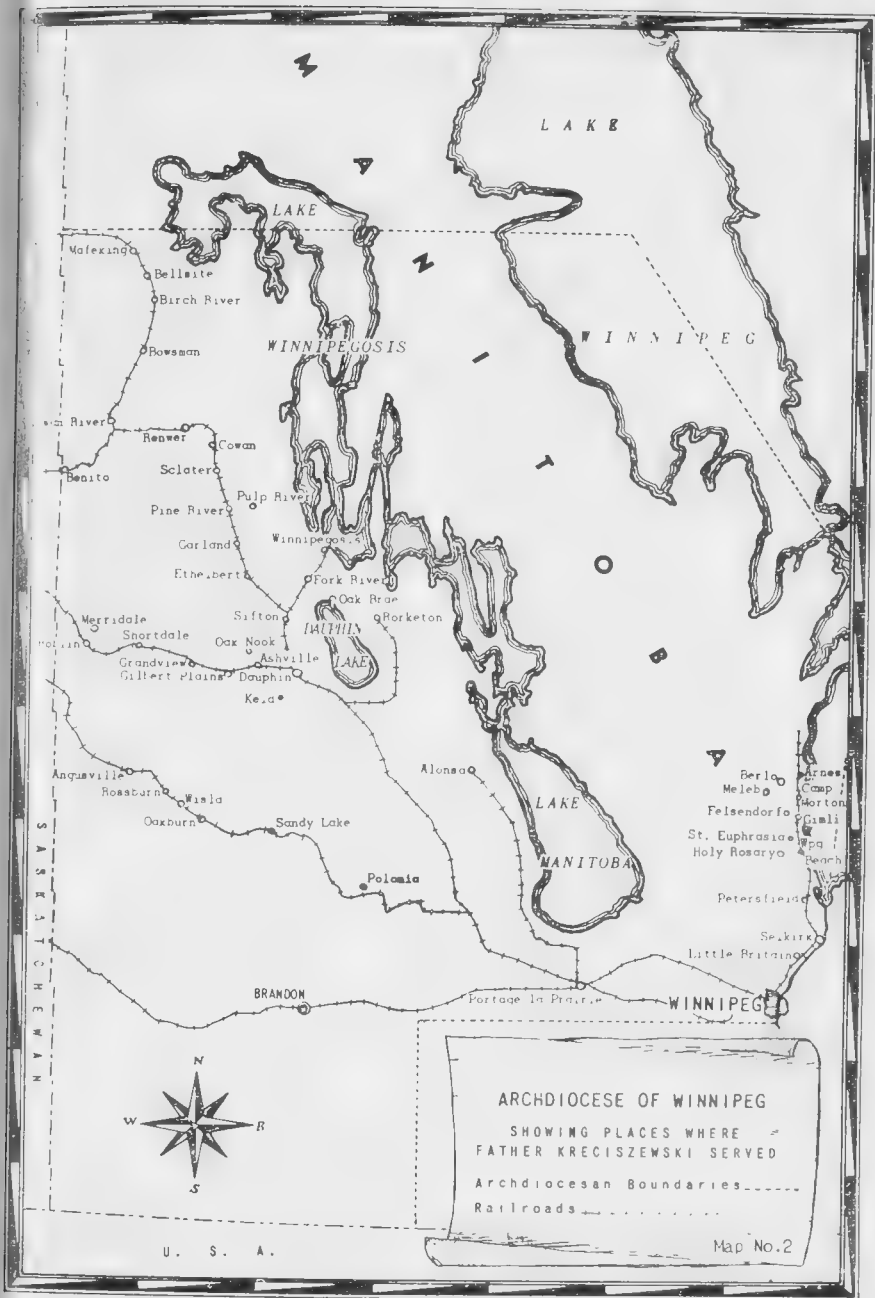
After a month's holiday spent with his family and friends, the young missionary, with his confrere Father I. E. Zielonka⁸, left for Canada. They arrived in Winnipeg on December 6.

This priest who may well be numbered among the Polish pioneers in Manitoba, came to the province at a period when it was just emerging from the pioneer state. The Church in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg, particularly the Polish missions, would still require years to get beyond that condition. Not only did those years coincide with Father Kręciszewski's ministry in the Archdiocese, but he did much to improve conditions in the little missions he served, bringing them along both spiritually and materially.

He was quick to catch the pioneer spirit from priests like Father Joseph Solski, Francis Kowalski,

THE YOUNG MISSIONARY (1897 to 1921)

Leonard Nandzik and others, who had seen the beginnings of the Polish settlements in Manitoba. He retained that spirit to his last days, working with whatever means and materials were at hand. The less he had to work with, the more resourceful he was.



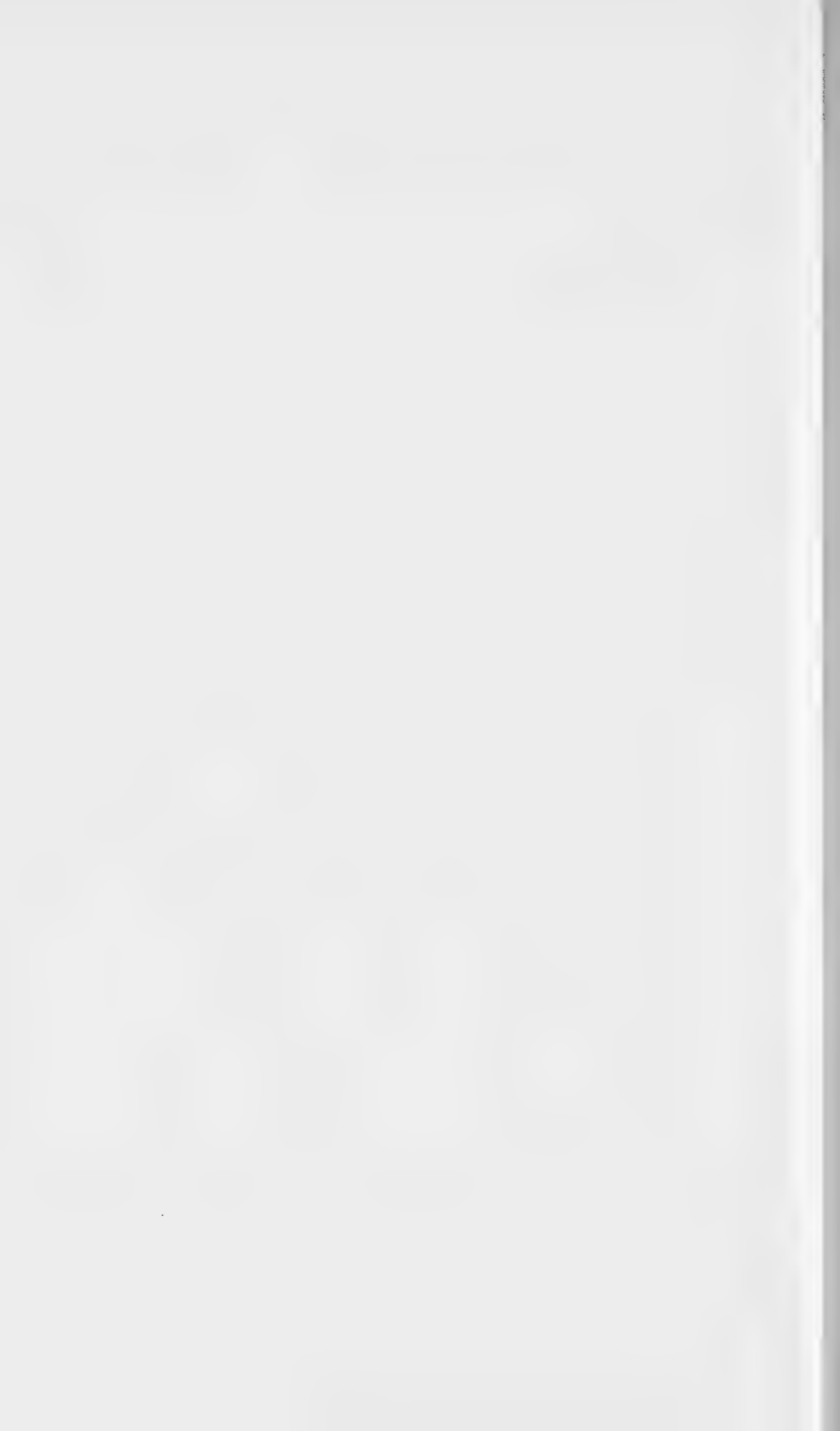
ARCHDIOCESE OF WINNIPEG

SHOWING PLACES WHERE
FATHER KRECISZEWSKI SERVED

Archdiocesan Boundaries

Railroads

Map No. 2



3 — FIRST ASSIGNMENTS (1921 to 1925)

THE QUALITIES WHICH DISTINGUISHED the missionary life of Father Kręciszewski were not apparent when he first set foot on Manitoba soil. A glance at this unassuming young clergyman, as he stepped from the train in Winnipeg, rather awakened sympathy than any hope that he would endure for long the rigors of the Manitoban missions. He was handsome, of slight build, slow and deliberate of movement, with a twinkle of kindness and good humor in his eyes, which were to delight his friends all his life. When he spoke, his voice was surprisingly deep for so slight a man. Yet it took thirty years to break that small frame, with long trips over bad roads, long hours of fast, strenuous physical labor, exposure to cold, hunger and lack of sleep. His physical endurance was phenomenal.

This was the missionary who presented himself to Archbishop Sinnott in 1921, and received his first assignment as assistant to Father Joseph Solski at St. John Cantius Church in Winnipeg.

The parish was in its beginnings. It had been founded in 1917, and the church, which was only a basement capped with a roof, had been built in 1918. The duties of the young curate — the second in the parish — consisted in helping the pastor in the parish, but especially in visiting the rural mission chapels. There were numbers of these chapels in the Archdiocese, where Polish priests could visit but a few times a year. The people were growing accustomed to attend Mass and hear sermons so infrequently, that their Faith was in danger.

For Father Kręciszewski these first weeks in Winnipeg were a time of reconnoitering. Brought up in the Polish atmosphere of his home in the Polish quarters of Buffalo, and speaking faultless Polish himself, the language of the Poles in Manitoba sounded strange to his ears, with its admixture of Ukrainian. He had never heard the Ukrainian language before.

One of his first visits outside the city was to Arborg on December 30, to attend the celebration of the 25th Anniversary of Profession of Mother Veronica, Prioress of the Benedictine Sisters. The first impression he received of the backwardness of the

rural settlements, remained with him all his life. This observant American was quick to note that in development and organization, the Poles in Manitoba were fifty years behind their American compatriots.

In January, when he began his missionary travels, the needs of the Church and some of the problems of missionary life were first brought home to him. His first scheduled visits were to Our Lady of the Scapular and Holy Rosary chapels in the vicinity of Winnipeg Beach. He experienced the inconvenience of winter travel by open sleigh, and of living in the cramped quarters of a farmhouse. He felt the embarrassment of causing good people to put themselves to endless trouble to make his stay as pleasant as they knew how. These conditions were to accompany his ministry in various places for many years. The inconvenience of these visits to the homes of his parishioners was well repaid in the firsthand knowledge the priest gained of his people and of the conditions in which they lived.

The same month he held services at St. Hyacinth's Church at Portage la Prairie and in the little chapel at Alonsa, about one hundred and twenty miles northwest of Winnipeg. In February his visits included Victoria Park and Gimli, as Ss. Cyril and Methodius' mission was then called. But these first missionary endeavors in Manitoba came to an abrupt halt, when in March, 1922, Archbishop Sinnott sent him tempo-

FIRST ASSIGNMENTS (1921 to 1925)

rarily to Calgary, Alberta, where the need for priests was also urgent.

The work in the Calgary diocese was only a variant of the work in Manitoba: instead of farmers his parishioners were mostly miners. Poles, Slovaks, Italians, Ukrainians, Anglo-Saxons, he served them all with the same zealous care. Bishop McNally first appointed him pastor at Canmore and later at Bassano. From Canmore he travelled from place to place in a small car which climbed the steep hills along the Crow's Nest Pass with difficulty, or not at all.

His work was full of spiritual consolation. His people were often rough and rugged, but this young priest, with his great devotion and kindness was able to penetrate the hard outward shell. He lived frugally: often he would boil a pot of eggs and would live on hard-boiled eggs for a week. But he was austere towards himself only; in his relations with others he had a serene disposition and good humor, which attracted people and made them friendly.

In the midst of his mission travels in this rugged country, he found time to write. A poem entitled *The Mother of Moses* was his first contribution to the *Gazeta Katolicka* ⁹. This was the beginning of a continuous stream of verse and prose which flowed from his pen throughout most of his life as a priest.

Alberta was the place where Father Kręciszewski

picked up the nickname of 'Father Joe'. In his first months in Calgary, the Anglo-Saxons found difficulty in pronouncing his name, and simply called him Father Joseph. He never objected to the name, but neither did he ever use it himself. He never felt the desire to alter or shorten his family name. Thereafter to all his friends he was known as Father Joe.

On his return to Manitoba at the beginning of 1925, Father Joseph was appointed pastor at St. John Cantius Church at Oakburn, with care of the chapels at Angusville, Sandy Lake, Wisla and Rosburn. He was no longer a novice missionary. He knew better the spiritual needs of the people and the difficulties of his vocation.

The few months he spent at Oakburn he employed so well that the people were full of admiration for this young pastor, who handled the hammer and saw with the same ease he did the pen. On his arrival he immediately set to work to remodel the interior of the church. Because the building was in such poor repair, he had plans to erect a new one. But he was transferred before he could carry out his plans.

The attention he gave to his parish and missions, did not prevent him from indulging in his favorite pastime of writing. From March until July, he composed five poems on widely varied subjects¹⁰, he wrote three essays and a lengthy report on a Religious Profession which he attended at Arborg. The first

FIRST ASSIGNMENTS (1921 to 1925)

of his articles was on *The Ouija Board and Spiritism*,¹¹, the second on *Notes from the History of the Inquisition* ¹² and the third *A Mess of Potage* ¹³. There seemed to be no limit to the interests and the ability of this missionary-pastor.

4 — THE STUDENT PRIEST ABROAD (1925 to 1928)

ARCHBISHOP SINNOTT WAS not slow in recognizing the talents of this gifted priest whom he had acquired for his diocese. He decided to give him an opportunity to pursue further studies in Rome. In this decision he was encouraged by Bishop McNally of Calgary, who also came to know and to value the aptitudes of Father Kręciszewski. Archbishop Sinnott's feeling was that: "Father Kręciszewski will be a credit to the Polish people of Manitoba and the Catholic people generally" ¹⁴.

Father Joe travelled to Rome as a pilgrim for the Holy Year in 1925. He first visited his home in Buffalo for a brief rest. While apprising his family of his good fortune, his father voiced his misgivings about the ocean voyage in these words: "The water

has taken one of my boys, and now the fish will eat you up”.

He arrived at Montreal on October 16, where on the pier he met Father J. E. Cahill. This meeting was the beginning of a life-long friendship. The two priests sailed the same day and arrived in Rome after an uneventful crossing. They took up residence at the Canadian College, a residence for Canadian priests studying in the various institutions at Rome.

Father Joe enrolled in the Pontifical Biblical Institute, where after a two-year course, he obtained the degree of Bachelor of Sacred Scriptures. His third year in Rome he spent studying at the St. John Lateran University, at the conclusion of which he was awarded a Doctorate of Sacred Theology.

During those years abroad, his keen and active mind absorbed not only the sacred sciences, but the myriad impressions which necessarily fix themselves on the mind of a visitor to the Eternal City. Following the custom of the students, he tried each day to visit a different church. The comparison of the old Roman churches and the sumptuous basilicas with the tiny chapels of Manitoba could not escape him. The missions of Manitoba seemed centuries removed, while the old churches seemed new and actual.

During the four months of summer vacation, he went on pilgrimages in Italy, he visited France and other parts of Europe, and also travelled to the Holy

Land. He was acquiring knowledge and gaining experience which he would some day lavish on the simple folk of his missions in Manitoba.

In the course of his stay in Europe, he perfected his knowledge of Latin, he learned the Italian and French languages, in addition to the firm grasp he required of Hebrew and Greek for his scriptural studies. All this learning would make him one of the most unusual missionaries to travel the dusty roads and muddy trails of Manitoba.

When he returned to Winnipeg in May of 1928, as unaffected and unassuming as he had ever been, he went back to the missions, giving unstintingly of his knowledge and energy to the souls confided to his care.

5 — THE BUILDER

THE VERSATILITY OF FATHER Joe's talents and the broad range of his interests were clearly apparent in the six years following his return from Rome. He moved from parish to parish six times, performing a diversity of tasks and pursuing his numerous personal interests, which were always turned to the benefit of the Church.

The circumstance which determined his first appointment was a letter written to Archbishop Sinnott by a spokesman for the Poles of Dauphin ¹⁵. The letter, purporting to be voicing the feelings of twenty-two Polish families in Dauphin, begged the Archbishop either to appoint a Polish priest to the Dauphin parish, or to allow the Poles to buy the old St. Viator's church and open a new parish.

Naturally Archbishop Sinnott was unwilling to

divide Dauphin into a Polish and an English parish. The problem which then faced him was to recur periodically in his Archdiocese. In parishes made up of Anglo-Saxons and Poles, an Anglo-Saxon priest could not give the necessary care to the Poles who spoke little English. A Polish priest on the other hand could serve both the Poles and Anglo-Saxons.

In April, 1928, the Archbishop made the decision to send Father Kręciszewski to Dauphin¹⁶. This was a novel move and marked a wide departure from past policy: never had a Polish priest been pastor at Dauphin.

On his arrival at Winnipeg at the beginning of May, Father Joe was informed of the Archbishop's intention. Willingly he took up his duties at Dauphin. The appointment proved a happy one; the Anglo-Saxons appreciated the energy and zeal of this learned priest, while the Poles were overjoyed that he was one of their own and could speak to them in their own language.

When he settled down to his task, his activities ranged far beyond the ministry of the parish and the missions of Gilbert Plains, Oak Nook and Grandview. His deep interest in the Scriptures occupied his mind a good deal now. It resulted in numerous articles published in the *Gazeta Katolicka* at this period.

Another of his hobbies came to light in Dauphin. He was instructed to sell a house which had belonged

to a Community of Benedictine Sisters from the United States¹⁷. On the successful completion of the transaction the Sisters presented him with a violin. It was this violin he used to play for relaxation. He also liked to play the organ. Both these instruments he could handle with better than ordinary skill.

His Dauphin ministry was short, and ended when Father Solski, pastor of St. John Cantius Church left for an extended visit to Poland. From the middle of June until October in 1929, Father Joe was administrator of the parish. This was a unique experience in his life, as he never knew or desired the prestige of being a city pastor. Honors meant so little to him, or he felt so unworthy of them, that he declined Archbishop Sinnott's invitation to become chancellor of the Archdiocese.

His kindness and his abilities were not unknown to the people of St. John Cantius parish. So it was with genuine joy that they welcomed him to the parish at a reception in his honor.

The administrator took on all the work of the pastor with a good measure of tasks which lay in his own field of interest. He visited the missions which called on his services, helping at Victoria Park on first Holy Communion day and on the occasion of Confirmation. During July and August, in the absence of J. S. Pazdor, editor of the *Gazeta Katolicka*, Father

Joe and Father Kosian edited the paper. He was not only willing to help but he always did so ably.

When Father Solski returned from Poland, Father Kręciszewski was named pastor at Swan River with care of the numerous missions in the district. This northern outpost of the Archdiocese was not an enviable post at the time. He accepted it as though it were a model parish.

No amount of pastoral work or manual labor seemed to exhaust his energies. During the year he spent at Swan River, he built a church at Birch River and a sacristy at Swan River. In this northern mission he was not forgotten by his friends in Alberta. From one of them the remembrance took the form of a personal gift of \$ 60.00, which Father Joe promptly used to buy material for the Birch River chapel. At Bowsman he painted the existing chapel, and was planning to build one at Bellsite.

As far as he was from Winnipeg, Father Joe nonetheless made frequent trips to the city. One trip was made to preach a Forty Hours' Devotion; another to give a sermon at St. Mary's Cathedral, then again to take over the editorship of the *Northwest Review* in the absence of the editor. On October 10, Archbishop Sinnott instructed him to begin work on the *45th Anniversary Number* of that paper. The issue bears the unmistakable stamp of Father Joe's original and fresh approach to the subject, and is in his clear and simple style.

The death, on October 13, of Father Anthony Plucinski, pastor at Polonia, brought another change for Father Joe. Without hesitation, Archbishop Sinnott appointed him to fill the vacancy at Polonia. But before taking over his new duties, he was to complete his work on the *Northwest Review*. It was not until Christmas Day that he was free to take possession of his new parish.

Here as elsewhere, Father Joe left ample evidence of his zeal and labor. Arriving in the winter, he could not undertake any building project. True, he was able to do little repair jobs, but the major undertaking was to wait until the summer. He already had plans to enlarge the church ¹⁸.

In the meantime, every Wednesday evening of Lent, he preached at St. Mary's Cathedral ¹⁹. And on March 19, he also preached at St. John Cantius Church at an evening service.

His first construction scheme at Polonia was a twenty-five foot extension of the church, and a complete interior remodelling. When he announced on Sunday that work on the construction would begin the following day, a mysterious silence fell over the congregation. He began to wonder whether the project would be started. On Monday morning, to his great joy, twelve teams of horses drawing wagon-loads of stones for the foundation, converged on the

church. Work began in earnest and did not let up until the rebuilding was complete.

To secure Sisters for the parish, he gave up the rectory for their use, and built an addition to the rear of the church for his own quarters. As it turned out later, neither the priest's quarters nor the Sisters' residence were quite adequate; repairs had to be made to both buildings.

The blessing of the enlarged church took place in September, with great ceremony and a large concourse of clergy and faithful²⁰. The people of Polonia could hardly believe their eyes, that this parish, tucked away in a distant valley, seldom visited by strangers, unknown beyond the second hill, had suddenly become the center of so much activity and attention. They could not explain what had happened to the parish — to themselves. This parish where only a year ago a very minor repair job would have been the occasion for endless bickering, now had enlarged the church, embellished it, added quarters for the priest and obtained Sisters, all without effort as it seemed, nay with enthusiasm.

They knew that Father Kręciszewski was responsible for the new life in the parish. But how he accomplished all this remained a mystery to them. And therefore at the beginning of December in 1931, when he announced that he was to leave the parish, there was consternation among the people. Their

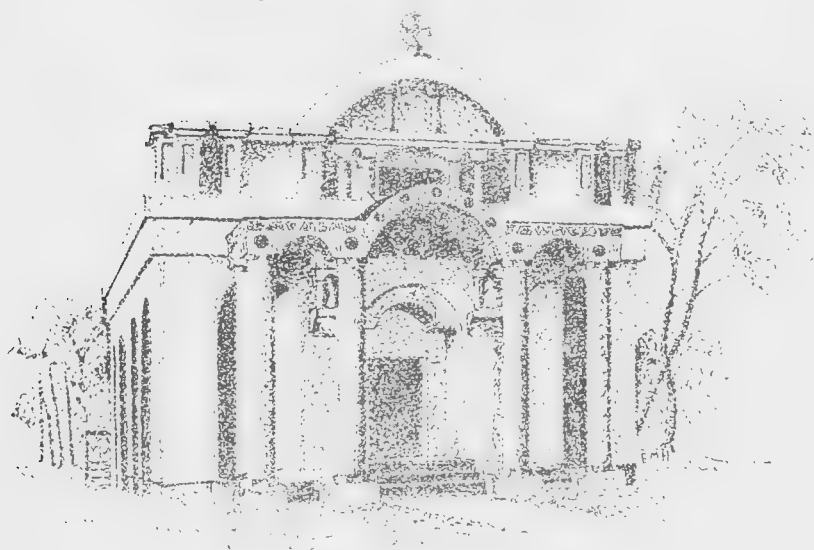
sorrow was genuine, for Father Joe's personality had that magnetic quality which drew people to him. He had the gift of making the dulllest place lively, and of making the most ordinary work something of an adventure. It can be truly said that he enriched the lives of many.

Archbishop Sinnott observed with keen satisfaction the enthusiasm that Father Kręciszewski could awaken in a parish in a short period of time. There was no doubt that the people not only respected this priest whom they so often saw in work-clothes, but they loved him. He was able to win their confidence and to communicate his zeal to them. There was no difficulty in placing a priest of such qualities; the problem was to place him where his talents could be employed to the best advantage.

In 1932, the Archbishop separated the mission chapel at Selkirk from the St. Vital parish at Fort Garry on which it depended for services²¹. The congregation at Selkirk was made up of French and Anglo-Saxon Catholics. But there were also thirty-five families of Poles in the town, who were receiving little or no spiritual care. If the Poles were to join the parish — instead of having their own church — the existing church could not accommodate the whole congregation. To weld the parish into one unit would require a man of tact, and one who could take the initiative in the project of building a new church.



Notre Dame Church at Selkirk
built by Father Kręciszewski in 1932



St. Benedict's Church at Camp Morton
built by Father Kręciszewski in 1933

Who was better qualified for this than was Father Kręciszewski?

The Archbishop appointed him to the parish, and informed him that the Catholic Church Extension Society was providing \$ 1000.00 for a new church, but the people themselves must contribute an equal amount. Father Joe raised the required sum and began the construction of a new church. Enthusiasm ran high among the parishioners. It seemed to them that overnight their little mission grew into a parish. The church which their willing hands erected still stands today, much the worse for wear, but a landmark in the life of the parish.

As soon as his mission was accomplished, Father Joe's stay in the parish came to an end. Just as his work began to show signs of fruition, he was given a new task. The deepest regret swept the parish at the news of his departure.

This time the occasion of his transfer to another parish was a fire which destroyed St. Anthony's church at Camp Morton, on January 29, 1933. In looking about for a priest who could replace the church at the least possible expense and with the shortest delay, Archbishop Sinnott's choice fell on the pastor of Selkirk.

Father Joe justified the confidence which his Superior placed in his ability. He soon had a new church standing, which was dedicated to St. Benedict.

The Archbishop himself indicated the title, in recognition of the work of the Polish Benedictine Sisters, at Camp Morton and throughout the Archdiocese. The new church was blessed on September 3, with the Archbishop preaching the sermon to the vast gathering, and giving Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The presence of twenty priests at this afternoon ceremony, and a choir made up of Benedictine Sisters from Arborg, added to the solemnity of the occasion ²².

At Winnipeg Beach, which was a mission of Camp Morton, Father Joe prepared the rectory for a resident priest. The cottage beside the church on Park Avenue was only a summer building erected in 1917. With a gift from the Catholic Church Extension Society, he was able to enlarge the cottage and, to the best of his resources, make it more or less proof against the severe winter cold.

True to the pattern of this period of his life. Father Joe was again transferred. However, his new appointment did not take him far away: he was again made pastor of the Selkirk parish. This time his stay there did not last a year, and his time was devoted less to manual labor. He concentrated his efforts on writing.

While he was pastor at Selkirk his book entitled *Sunday Gospels for the Layman* was published. It was another pioneer effort, since it was the first time that a work of a priest of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg had been published.

In January of 1935, he began a new series of articles in the Polish weekly, which ran for 24 weeks. It was called *On the Highways of the World* ²³.

He was a frequent visitor to Winnipeg, preaching the lenten sermons at St. John Cantius Church in 1934, and taking an active part in the life of the Polish community in the city.

As he later remarked ²⁴, his stay at Selkirk which ended in July of 1935, closed one period of his life and opened another. The time of wandering from parish to parish had ended, and he was to find a permanent place in Sifton. He was still a young man, having the experience of fourteen years of priesthood, and showing promise of greater accomplishments.

6 — FOR HIS OWN PEOPLE

TO PRESENT A PANORAMIC picture of the work and interests of this richly-endowed minister of the Church, mention must be made of a phase of his activity which was little known outside the Polish community in Manitoba.

As a true priest of God, Father Joe was a priest to all, regardless of racial origin. Never was his attitude one to offend others — as he himself had been offended — because of racial background. He was too much a man of God to allow the accident of race to bias his thinking.

He did however show a particular interest in those of his own racial origin, because he felt that they were the most abandoned and that they needed his help most. In the annals of the Poles in Manitoba.

no other Pole has sought the interests of his own people so consistently as did Father Kręciszewski. Neither has any other person, cleric or lay, had a deeper and more beneficial influence on the Polish community, than this retiring, hard-working country pastor. This influence was due as much to his profound learning and his genial personality, as to his interest in all matters which concerned the Faith, traditions and living conditions of the Poles.

Although he had never visited Poland, he was deeply conscious of the heroic spirit of that land. He was familiar with its history and its literature. He admired its people for the great sufferings they had endured in their history to defend their Catholic Faith and their national independence. He tried to make the Manitoba-born Poles aware of the noble moments of Polish history.

It is an alleged weakness of the Poles in Manitoba that they lack a leader towards whom the group could gravitate and who could express its sentiments. Father L. J. Kręciszewski came nearest to achieving that status.

His most active participation in the life of the Polish ethnic group in Manitoba was through the *Associated Poles of Manitoba*, of which he was one of the founders and the first president²⁵. This organization was born of the necessity of the moment. It was formed in Winnipeg on January 18, 1933, by a group

of priests and Catholic laymen, to offset the secularizing influence of other Polish societies which were then active. The Associated Poles were first organized on a provincial scale, comprising as constituent members all the Polish Catholic parishes and Catholic organizations. Later it extended to other provinces and became the *Associated Poles of Canada*. Father Kręciszewski also served as president of this broader organization.

The aim of this association was Catholic Action. The delegates representing the parishes and Catholic lay organizations met regularly to find means to strengthen the Catholic life of the Poles in Manitoba. It also served as a forum where the Poles could freely exchange ideas and work out ways to promote their common interests.

Father Joe was a leading figure in this organization. His opinions and recommendations were highly valued, and his lectures on the various phases of Catholic Action were always well attended. Whether he was president of the Association or a member, he worked many years to tighten the bonds between the Poles in Manitoba and in Canada.

From his first days in Manitoba Father Joe took a lively interest in the *Gazeta Katolicka*, which was the oldest Polish weekly in Canada. The numerous articles which he contributed were aimed at instructing the Poles in matters of Faith as well as bringing

to them information of general interest to Poles. No one man contributed more to the continuation of this paper when its position was becoming financially precarious. When it was finally forced to discontinue publication and to amalgamate with the *Głos Polski*, a Polish weekly in Toronto, he felt its loss heavily, and deplored the indifference of those who should have supported the paper. The Catholic press was a form of apostolate by which he set great store.

On two occasions he tried himself to publish reviews in the Polish language. Both these attempts were given up when he sensed the poor response they were receiving.

All his writings in the Polish paper, whether in prose or in verse, were directed to the Poles of Manitoba. He instructed them, chided them, praised them, sympathized with them — never did he ridicule them. One felt that he lived in their midst, that their welfare was uppermost in his mind. There ever burned in him the desire to help them, to raise them from their underprivileged position, to encourage them in their Faith. He was a true priest of the people. He waged a one-man crusade against overwhelming odds to help the Poles retain their identity as Poles and Catholics. He was not one to be discouraged and he stood by his own people to his last day.

They owe him a debt of profound gratitude.

P A R T II: 1935—1952

“Veritatem facientes in caritate”.

Ephesians 4, 15

I — SIFTON MISSIONS IN 1935

AFTER LEAVING SELKIRK Father Kręciszewski made a prolonged visit to the United States. It was on this occasion that he and Father Zielonka invited the Felician Sisters of the Buffalo Province to investigate the possibility of opening a house in Winnipeg²⁶. During this time Archbishop Sinnott decided to send Father Joe to Sifton with Father Thaddeus Derezinski as his assistant.

Father Joe left Winnipeg for Sifton in the first days of August in 1935 by motorcycle. This way of travel was novel even for Father Joe. As he was not too confident of reaching his destination by this means, Father Zielonka followed him by automobile. He did not travel far before help was needed. Near Headingly, the motorcycle skidded, throwing Father

SIFTON MISSIONS IN 1935

Joe to the road. Fortunately he was unhurt, and returned to Winnipeg to make the trip to Sifton by a less risky means.

In 1935 Sifton was in the backwoods of the Arch-diocese. Knowing the missions of Manitoba, Father Joe was not discouraged at what he found. The drab village, having sprung up on the railroad, was most inconveniently situated for highway travel. Provincial Trunk Highway No. 19 by-passed Sifton by nine miles to the west, while Highway No. 20 ran five miles to the east. The roads leading from the south were nothing more than improved trails, and were impassable in rainy weather. In wet weather and in the winter months, the only dependable means of communication in and out of Sifton was by train.

If anywhere in Manitoba the priest's work depended upon good communications, it was in Sifton, with its sixteen missions scattered in all directions. These missions were for the most part small settlements comprising from ten to forty families, widely dispersed around the hamlets and villages which dotted the railway lines. In each neighborhood there was a little chapel. If the chapel was located near the railway station, it was accessible only by train. If it were near the center of the settlement, it could be reached only by car over hazardous roads.

For a year Father Joe attempted to serve these missions with the help of Father Derezinski alone.

The task was not only disheartening, it was impossible. The location of the missions on the different branches of the railroad added immensely to the difficulty of serving them.

There were six missions strung out along the railroad running through Sifton north to Swan River. The chapels were situated at fifteen and twenty mile intervals, with Renwer being seventy-five miles from Sifton. Only the mission church at Ethelbert, located near the highway, could be reached by car in all weather. The other churches were built near the railroad, and were a mile or more from the highway, to which they were linked by side roads which were useless except in dry weather.

A visit by train to any of these missions required three days. The only weekend train running north left Sifton early on Saturday mornings. Being a mixed train, it reached the various stations during the day, and Renwer only late in the evening. This meant the priest had to stay over night at the home of a parishioner, to hold services on Sunday morning. The train did not return south until Monday.

Even the stopovers at the homes of the parishioners were often tedious. Few farmers had large homes, and the priest was embarrassed by having to occupy space which the family could ill spare. Sometime the host felt that he must entertain his pastor at all times, so leaving the priest scarcely enough

privacy to say his prayers. Father Joe bore these inconveniences with good humor, and profited by these contacts to instruct his parishioners.

The missions at Fork River and Winnipegosis were on a branch line of the Canadian National Railway running northeast of Sifton. These chapels were no easier of access than the missions on the main line. Another mission, Rorketon, was situated on the east side of Dauphin Lake and could be reached only by the long route through Ste Rose du Lac. While the little chapel at Oak Brae, hidden in a rustic setting on the northern shore of the same lake could be visited only in dry weather in the summer months. Father Joe and his assistant paid regular visits to all these chapels.

The mission stations south and west of the town of Dauphin, presented an even greater problem. The distance from Sifton was greater, and two of the chapels — those at Keld and Merridale — were located fifteen to twenty miles from the railroad, on poor roads. Nevertheless the Poles there received the same attention from Father Joe as did those in the more conveniently situated missions.

After about a year of this strenuous work at Sifton, in the fall of 1936, Father Joe was appointed pastor of St. Hedwig's parish in the city of Brandon. But instead of accepting this post himself, he resigned it in favor of his assistant.

On the first few Sundays on which he was to take up his new duties, he asked Father Derezinski to replace him in Brandon. Each time that Father Derezinski returned to Sifton, he praised the Brandon parish in such glowing terms, that Father Joe could not fail to notice the attraction the parish had for the young priest. He therefore begged the Archbishop to appoint the assistant to St. Hedwig's. The Archbishop graciously complied with Father Joe's request, and to replace Father Derezinski he sent two young assistants to Sifton: Fathers Francis Strozewski and Joseph Sieczkarski.

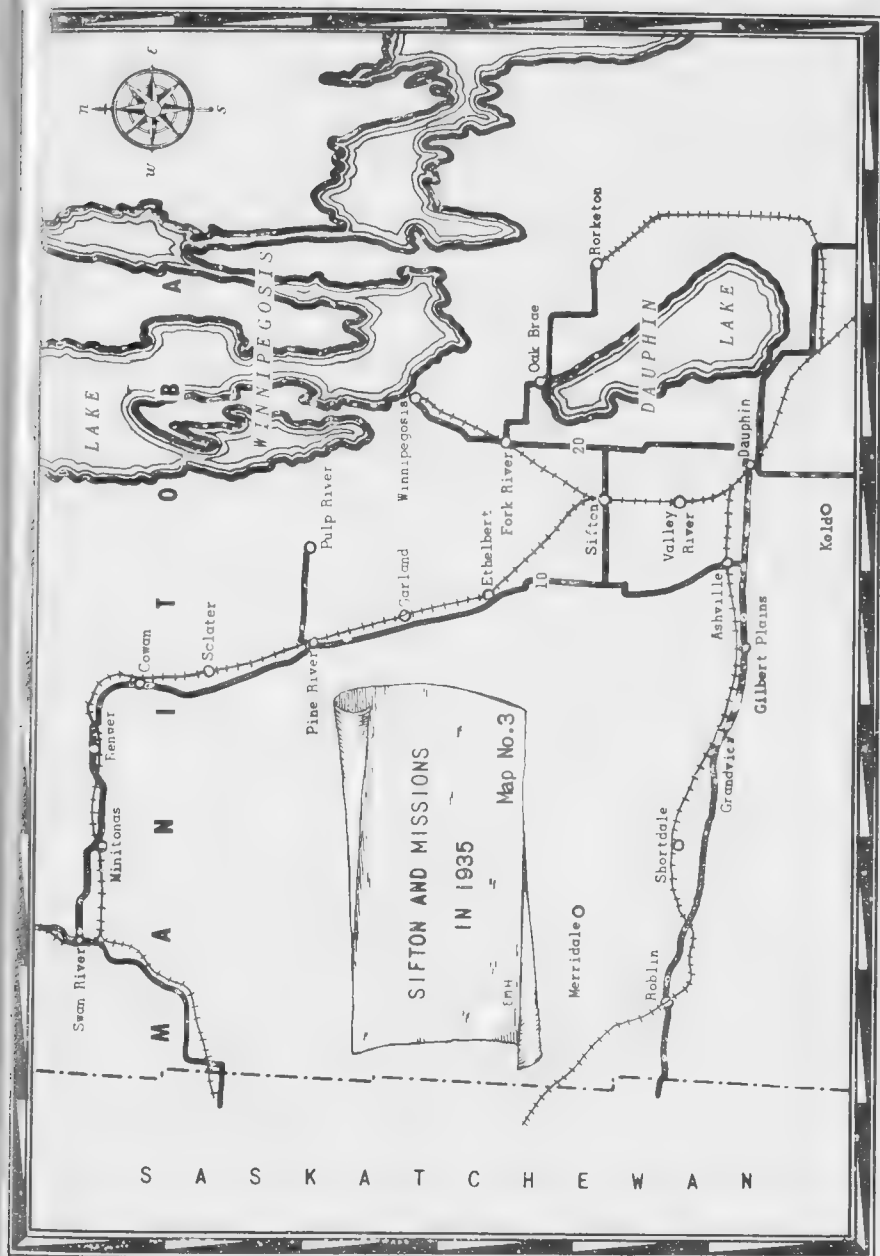
Those were happy days in his life. The amount of work to be done was enormous, his enthusiasm knew no bounds, and the Archbishop had the highest regard for the work of this zealous missionary.

It was plain to see that the care the missions could receive from priests residing in Sifton was very limited and ineffective. Father Joe began to plan the establishing of centers where priests could live nearer their people. He first suggested to the Archbishop that rectories be built at Roblin and Renwer²⁷ and that priests be stationed there. Then he considered Shortdale the better location for a resident missionary in preference to Roblin. Finally he decided that Grandview and Pine River were best suited for the priests' headquarters, as they would be within shorter distances of their missions²⁸. Archbishop

Sinnott approved the plan, and in August of 1939 Father Joe began work on the rectory at Grandview.

In September Father Mieczysław Trzaskoma, then assistant at Sifton, took up residence at Grandview to become the first resident pastor. In the spring of 1940, a house was built at Pine River, and Father Z. A. Baczkowski was named resident missionary there. Since in 1937, Father Sieczkarski had been appointed pastor at Winnipegosis and chaplain to the Benedictine Sisters at their new hospital, in 1940, Father Joe was left at Sifton with Ashville as a lone mission.

This did not in the least signify that the pastor of Sifton was left with less work. He cut his work out for himself, and he gave himself a very generous portion.





Holy Trinity Church at Sifton in 1935



Holy Trinity Church after remodelling

2 — THE WORK

THE FRIENDS OF FATHER Kręciszewski were constantly amazed at the kind and the amount of work which he undertook and completed. Their frequent pleas for him to spare his energies went unheeded. As a priest he felt that every ounce of his strength and every minute of his time belonged to God and to the Church. To him this was not a pious aspiration, but a conviction, a reality by which he lived. He had that deep feeling for truth in behavior which St. Paul so strongly recommends ²⁹.

My close association with Father Joe began in the first days of September in 1939. He was taking me to Sifton as his assistant. As we pulled away from St. John Cantius rectory in a cloud of dust raised by his huge Hudson sedan, he opened the conver-

sation with what seemed to me a strange question. "Are you handy with a hammer?" he asked in his low voice.

By the time we had reached Sifton, he had given me a general idea of the type of work that a missionary was called upon to do. He was presently building a rectory at Grandview, hence his interest in my skill with a hammer.

In 1939, his four-years' work was well in evidence both in his little parish and in his missions. On his arrival at Sifton he had found the chapels he was to serve just as they had been ten or twenty years previously, except that some of them had greatly deteriorated. At once he began to repair and to improve them.

He started with the parish church. He found it an unpretentious little building, as plain and inconvenient as the unimaginative builder could make it in 1929. After a few months of hard work, Father Joe transformed it beyond recognition. He stuccoed the exterior, added a portico with six massive columns, and spent weeks in decorating the interior in various colors and effects, until the transformation seemed almost miraculous. All during his stay in Sifton, he continually sought ways to improve the church, adding a new altar with a glass front, large ornamental candlesticks, decorative angels, and finally in 1948 adding a side chapel dedicated to St. Joseph.

He gave no less attention to the grounds. The large clock on the church lawn and the colored lights, the mission cross and the grotto became objects of attraction to visitors. If he displayed a touch of vanity in guiding his visitors through the church and over the grounds, it was so candid and childlike as to be almost a virtue.

He was ever building, improving, remodelling, painting, either at the Convent or at the church. No undertaking seemed too big for him or too lowly, even though most of the time he worked with the help of only one man, and often enough alone. He was gardiner, plumber, electrician, mechanic, engineer, or whatever other skill the need of the moment called for. Never did a priest turn his hand to so many humble tasks.

His mission churches received the same care. In 1936 he decorated the chapel at Fork River and completely renovated the church at Winnipegosis. Later he remodelled the chapel at Ashville, although he found it one of the most difficult missions to serve. He also painted the interior of the churches at Pine River and Ethelbert.

His method of work was unique. For example, the building of the residence at Grandview was done in spurts of work of two or three days a week. Building took up only part of his time.

He would interrupt whatever work he was doing

THE WORK

in Sifton, and announce that we were going to Grandview. We would pack his car with all that was needed to work at Grandview. Mattresses, bedding, food, tools, cement, lime or whatever else was required was transported to the scene of the building. There was a sense of adventure in these trips to Grandview. They were not unlike an outing or a holiday.

On arrival at Grandview, after the car had been unloaded, work began at once. To call the building a rectory demanded some imagination. It was a simple lean-to at the rear of the church, divided into little rooms. The building was in the pioneer style, erected with what means and materials were at hand. The work went on all day. Father Joe was pleasant company at work. He carried on a steady flow of interesting conversation or humorous remarks, which made the time pass very quickly. By nightfall we were tired.

After the evening meal a little more work was done to take advantage of the daylight, then we retired. The church served as our sleeping quarters. Two pews were placed front to front to form a kind of crib to hold the mattresses. To me sleep came easily. But Father Joe did not sleep at once. By the light of a kerosene lamp he read in this makeshift bed until two or three o'clock in the morning. Although we were up at six o'clock to start the day with the celebration of Mass, he showed no signs of fatigue.

The same energy and spirit of sacrifice that drove the pioneers seemed to drive Father Joe. The pioneers endured hardships and discomfort through necessity: Father Joe through choice. There was no counting of tasks accomplished; he always went on to a new one. He had the initiative to begin and the tenacity to complete a task once begun. This was his undoing physically: the body could not keep pace with the zeal of this spirit.

3 — CATECHISM BY CORRESPONDENCE

ALL THE MANUAL LABOR which Father Joe accomplished was only by way of a hobby or pastime; it was never his main interest. His cherished pursuit, his overriding interest was the course of Catechism by Correspondence. He pioneered this method of religious instruction in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg. He was its originator, and he edited and published it until his death. Money received for his personal use, he spent to improve and expand the course. He was at his happiest at this work ³⁰. When all his other works are forgotten, the course of Catechism by Correspondence will still be a fitting memorial to his name.

The course was born of sheer necessity. After a few months' stay in Sifton, he saw the impossibility of preparing the children for first Holy Communion

in his sixteen missions. In the early spring of 1936, he devised a course which he could send to the children by mail. About one hundred lessons went out to the children of his missions. To his great satisfaction he soon received seventy-one replies³¹. A second lesson was sent out, and the course was on its way.

The lessons were printed on a machine using hand-set type, requiring long hours of painstaking labor. But work was no deterrent to Father Joe. By the end of the year he had three hundred pupils enrolled in his course, and the help of the Benedictine Sisters had to be enlisted.

In October, Father Joe sold the ill-fated motorcycle in Fork River in order to have money for his catechetical work³². Since the course was proving popular with the children of his own missions, he obtained permission from Archbishop Sinnott to announce its existence to other priests in the Archdiocese. The Archbishop not only willingly granted the permission but he asked Father Joe to give a full report of his work to the clergy³³.

The number of children following the course snowballed, so that his personal means were no longer sufficient to cover the expenses. Archbishop Sinnott, and later Archbishop Murray obtained financial help for the course from the Catholic Church Extension Society. In 1941, the mailing list reached 3000 names, all receiving the course without charge. Naturally

the printing equipment became inadequate, and so more modern machines were purchased with all the accessories required for printing and mailing on a large scale.

Some idea of the work entailed in this apostolate by catechism can be gained from the content of the course. The beginners were started off with a Pre-Course of thirty lessons in elementary Christian Doctrine, profusely illustrated and accompanied by various games and projects. If they persevered, they graduated to the General Course consisting of ninety lessons, which covered the essentials of the Catholic Faith. When they completed this successfully, they received one or all of three Special Courses. The first was on Bible History in twenty-six lessons; the second was Bible History of the Old Testament in thirty-four lessons, and the third a series of twenty-nine sheets of Bible Symbols, illustrated and explained.

All these lessons were written and printed by Father Joe himself. Many times his machines could be heard running until two or three o'clock in the morning, printing a new supply of lessons which had run out of stock. The Sisters mailed and corrected the lessons, and kept the register of the children's progress. To supplement these lessons, Father Joe printed innumerable stories, contests, catechetical games and puzzles, rewarding successful solutions with prizes and certificates. The undertaking was big and costly.

In spite of the effectiveness of the course, it did not receive official recognition until 1951³⁴. This distressed Father Joe for many years. But he did not lose courage or interest in the work. His was an apostolic work and he knew that sacrifice was an inseparable portion of the priest.

Thanks to the yoeman work of this minister of God, the course today is on a sound basis, with about 1600 children in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg following it. Archbishop Pocock has integrated it into the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, and confided the work to the Benedictine Sisters at Arborg. They have modernized the course to suit today's needs, but the apostolic spirit of Father Joe is still in the work.

4 — WRITING

THE MAN WHO ENGAGES IN heavy manual labor is seldom inclined to write. And the man who writes much seldom feels the inclination to do physical work. Father Kręciszewski did both unsparingly — he kept his hands ever busy while his mind was always active. He never knew a moment of idleness. His time was divided between physical labor and writing. He did both with the same zest.

As a shepherd of souls and a Scripture scholar, the underlying theme of most of his writing was scriptural. The Scriptures were to him familiar ground, a favorite field. It is therefore natural that this special interest found expression in a book, which appeared on February 21, 1934, and was published by F. J. Tonkin Company. It was a labor of learned love ³⁵.

The work was widely reviewed and received excellent comments from the reviewers. From about twenty reviews I have selected the one from the editorial page of the *Northwest Review*, headed: "A New Book on the Gospels" ³⁶.

"A new book which will prove most useful to the Catholic layman makes its appearance this week. The fruit of years of study in Rome and travel in the Holy Land, *Sunday Gospels for the Layman* is the first complete work from the pen of the Reverend L. J. Kręciszewski, D.D., distinguished alumnus of the Pontifical Biblical Institute of Rome and well known for his scholarship in Scripture.

"It will prove of immense value to the Catholic man or woman who really desires to understand the sometimes difficult Sunday Gospels. Authoritative, it deals with each Gospel simply and clearly, and exhaustively enough to give the reader a competent grasp of the Gospel. Its three hundred and twelve pages are crammed with information, and it will undoubtedly prove of great value to the layman.

"The book marks a milestone in the history of the Archdiocese, as it is the first work published by any of the younger clergy who have come to Winnipeg since the formation of the Archdiocese ³⁷. It is a credit to the author, and a tribute to his scholarship, hitherto admitted by his intimates, but now made public by the appearance of this book.

"Every Catholic home should possess a copy of this valuable work, which for the first time places a reasonably priced book of this nature in the hands of the layman" ³⁸.

Fifteen years later Father Kręciszewski published a life of Christ intended for the children enrolled in his catechism course. He entitled this opuscle *Outline of the Life of Jesus Christ*. It is simply and charmingly written, revealing the pastor's love for souls. Archbishop Murray concluded his Forward to this book with these words: "Those who read your book will know Our Lord better; they will love him sincerely, they will do His holy will as He did the will of His Father" ³⁹.

This work is singular in that Father Joe also printed it himself ⁴⁰. Had it been published in a more attractive outward form, it would have received the attention it deserved. In its one hundred and eight pages are hidden treasures of scriptural learning, so realistically expressed as to be understood by children as well as by adults.

In addition to these two works on the Scriptures. on his return from Rome in 1928, Father Kręciszewski published a series of twenty-one articles in the *Gazeta Katolicka* under the general heading *The Scriptures* ⁴¹. His style in Polish was no less lucid and direct than his writing in English. His Polish vocabulary bore traces of the Polish classical writers, especially Adam

Mickiewicz and Henryk Sienkiewicz. Should these dissertations ever be printed in book form they would make an interesting volume for Polish readers.

It is interesting to note that in 1927 and 1928 two men were very active in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg, expounding the Catholic Faith. Their names were Father Theodore Przybyłek and Father L. J. Kręszewski ⁴².

After Father Joe began his course of Catechism by Correspondence, his main effort in writing was always directed towards that form of apostolate. This task was merely a variant of the scriptural theme; he was adapting his sacred scholarship to the needs of the children. This was his pet labor for which he spared no energy or expense.

In another phase of his writing Father Joe turned to the history of the Polish parishes in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg. In a series of seven historical sketches entitled *Our Immigration in the Parishes*, appearing in the *Gazeta Katolicka*, he set down in broad lines the struggle of the Poles in Manitoba to preserve their Faith and to survive as an ethnic group. The first instalment ⁴³ was an introduction to the series. The second and third articles outlined the history of the parish at Polonia ⁴⁴; the fourth and fifth ⁴⁵ traced the beginnings of the Sifton parish, and the last two sketched the background of St. Hyacinth's parish at Portage la Prairie ⁴⁶.

This was pioneer work, for little had been done by way of recording the beginnings and the struggle of the Polish parishes in Manitoba⁴⁷. Few were interested in the matter and Father Joe brought it to the attention of his readers both in the *Anniversary Number of the Northwest Review* and in the Polish weekly.

Although the whole *Anniversary Number of the Northwest Review* was conceived as an historical document, the Article entitled *30 Polish Churches in the Winnipeg Archdiocese* had a special significance for the Poles⁴⁸. Hitherto all matters of interest to the Poles or concerning their life and activities were written in the Polish language, and were thus confined to Polish readers. With this one article, Father Joe opened a new vista for the Poles in Manitoba. By writing about the Poles in the English language he brought into the open for all to see, the contribution the Poles were making to the growth of the Church in Manitoba. It is regrettable that the trail he blazed was not followed sooner.

Not only was Father Joe interested in presenting the Polish point of view to the Anglo-Saxons, but he tried to acquaint the Poles with the merits of other racial groups who make up the Church in Manitoba. This was his aim, when as pastor of Polonia, he published four articles on the *Arrival of the First Missionaries in Western Canada*⁴⁹.

Another genre of literary work to which he turned his hand with a notable measure of success was poetry. Especially in the early years of his priesthood, he loved to express himself in verse. He was really a poet at heart, seeing in men and nature far more than the average person perceives. Since his expression of thought and feeling is simple and clear in these compositions, they reveal some interesting facets of his character. Fortunately most of these poems have been preserved in the pages of the *Gazeta Katolicka*.

Although Father Joe was not the first Pole in Manitoba to write in verse, his compositions are more numerous and more diversified than those of the earlier writers⁵⁰. He wrote on such diverse subjects as: *The Alberta Miner*, *The Alberta Farmer*, *The Mother of Moses*, *To the Shades of Father Szymanowski*, *Epilogue to a Horse*, *The Annunciation*, *Scapular of Carmel*, *To My I. and M* (his two sisters who were nuns), *The Lot of a Peasant*, *Plea to the People*.

His gentle wit is pleasantly evident in a column which he wrote for the *Gazeta Polska* in 1944 and 1945. He presented a weekly visit of a godfather (who by Polish custom is accepted almost as a member of the family of his godchild) to the home of the godchild. There the head of the family and the godfather discuss their daily problems, the disappointments and joys of the past, the hopes of the future. Father Joe

depicted with humorous aptness the type of the Polish farmer in Manitoba, with his characteristic foibles and his solid virtue.

The column was entitled *From Our Village*. In 1944 he wrote twenty-seven instalments⁵¹, and the following year twenty⁵². The last twelve articles ran under the heading *Notes from a Country Godfather*⁵³. The column was not only entertaining but instructive. Each week the writer commented on a new and unexpected topic, in homely, picturesque language.

Among other literary efforts of Father Kręciszewski are two reviews⁵⁴, various devotional books and pamphlets.

After purchasing more elaborate printing equipment in 1949, he reprinted numerous booklets, including a booklet on Fatima, a 64-page Polish Catechism, the Appendix to the Roman Ritual and others of a similar kind. These were not his own compositions, but were his contribution to the apostolate of the printed word.



The original mission chapel at Winnipegosis



Winnipegosis Chapel after remodelling

5 — PRIESTS' HARBOR

PRIESTS FROM NEAR AND FAR gladly accepted Father Joe's invitations to attend the various parish functions at Sifton. Especially the Feast of Corpus Christi and the Forty Hours' Devotion brought the priests together in considerable numbers. These occasions were marked with particular solemnity, and people from the distant missions joined the large throngs of local residents. The devotion of the pastor was reflected in the piety of his people, and was a source of edification to the priests. At Forty Hours' Devotions Father Joe always spent several hours in church with his people. His spiritual life was a reality -- he shied from spiritual postures.

Sifton became a real harbor for priests, particularly for his neighbors, who visited him for advice,

for encouragement or merely for relaxation. The sincere delight with which he received his brother-priests was a mark of his practical charity. In our conforming age, when most people strive to live by the common pattern, he was a most refreshing exception. He set his own pattern. His views, his tastes and his judgments were not those of the world-wise sophisticate. His scale of values was different, but it was right. There was a quality about him which inspired confidence -- it was sanity.

He displayed traits which some had thought long lost and forgotten. One such characteristic was his indifference to his own comfort. He bore heat, cold, late working hours, long trips and fasting without complaint. On the contrary, he showed impatience with those who complained of discomfort. Only Father Joe would put up with a rectory where the floor was so cold that a tub of snow kept a few feet from the heater would not melt all winter long.

He had a detachment from things which others consider indispensable to their happiness: money, comfort, outward show. Most people have a strong attachment for money: few affect an ostentatious disdain for it; Father Joe was indifferent to it. He gave it away without regret. He helped many young priests with gifts.

Beside this outright detachment from money, Father Joe had an unaccountable attachment for

small, seemingly worthless things. Odds and ends of small machinery, of radio and car parts which he thought could yet be used, he saved with meticulous care.

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of his ordination, his parishioners were planning to present him with a new car. When he learned of their intention, he became quite angry and threatened to leave the parish unless they abandoned their plan. He would have carried out his threat, as he was most obstinate on this matter of a new car. He never bought a new automobile, but always managed with a used one. Never, though, did he show the least disapproval for others driving new cars.

Instead of accepting a gift from his people as is customary on such occasions, he made a substantial gift to Archbishop Murray. He had first intended to start a burse for Polish students to the priesthood. Then he made it a gift to be used by the Archbishop as he saw fit. It was an offering of thanksgiving.

Priests found Father Joe's company stimulating, perhaps because he belonged to that blessed group of people who are never bored with life. He was never at a loss at what to do with his time. He never just waited for something to happen, he was always making things happen. He was continually conceiving schemes and projects. Visiting him was not only interesting, it was exciting. One always found him in the

midst of some new undertaking. There was a sense of adventure in his life, not unlike that of a boy exploring the world.

As a conversationalist he had few equals. His store of exact information on the widest range of subjects was astounding. Many is the time when a conversation or discussion in which he participated was carried on well into the early hours of the morning, because no one felt inclined to leave.

This gift of easy and original expression made him a most effective speaker in the pulpit. His sermons were always simple, basic. No one could miss the ideas he was expounding in his resonant, bass voice. In his sermons as in his work, he was characterized by a calmness and lack of haste which were sometimes disconcerting. Seldom did he rush.

When he grew impatient with some criticism his retorts could be trenchant. To the charge by a layman that a priest leads a soft and easy life, he replied: "Why do you not let your sons study for the priesthood?" On another occasion when there was quibbling as to how much control the pastor should exercise over the parish finances, he said: "You trust the priest with your sins, but you do not trust him with a few petty pennies".

What attracted priests was the charm of this man whose intellectual and spiritual qualities were so remarkable and yet for the most part they went

unobserved. Knowing these merits, Archbishop Sinnott named him Dean of the Dauphin Deanery in 1940, and six years later Archbishop Murray appointed him Diocesan Consultor. But Father Joe always remained the striking example of a simple country pastor, a common laborer in the vineyard of the Lord. But to this common task he brought the most uncommon array of talents.

Father Joe always remained an American citizen. Although he was well acclimatized in Manitoba, he retained an unconcealed loyalty to the country of his birth. In spite of the efforts of his friends in the United States, who frequently tried to persuade him to return to the more congenial conditions of work in Buffalo, only once did he seriously consider leaving the missions of Manitoba. Even then he planned to go to the missions of the southern States.

It was in the fall of 1941. He was in the depth of discouragement, brought on perhaps by the seeming futility of the work in a small country parish, where no tangible results were apparent, and where, he felt, not only was his work not appreciated but was disparaged. He was human and momentarily he gave in to dejection. But soon he regained his composure and launched into his work with renewed zeal.

6 — LAST DAYS

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF THIS gifted missionary has not come within the scope of this study, except in so far as it was manifested exteriorly. It was not my aim to probe the secret life of his soul to attempt to uncover the nature of its dealings with God. This is a matter between the priest and God. Unless a man choose to reveal the hidden recesses of his soul, we are groping and guessing about his inner life.

In unguarded moments Father Joe expressed his sheer joy at being a priest. This seemed to be the hidden source of his impelling zeal, his untiring energy and his great kindness. The virtues of the priesthood came so natural to him, that it was difficult to picture him as anything but a priest. He had a native fitness for the priesthood. He was born to

his vocation. It was one of the charming traits of his life that he lived and died a simple priest.

The fateful illness which finally brought on his death started in 1948. It began with a stomach ulcer. In January of 1949, he suffered a hemorrhage and was laid up for a month. Four months later he was admitted to the hospital at Winnipegosis with swollen ankles. This condition subsided and he returned to Sifton and took up his work again. But he was back in the hospital in November for an appendectomy. He never recovered his former vigor, although he went about his duties as usual. It was a heavy cross for one who had never been ill to fall prey to this succession of ailments. Many times he showed impatience at not being able to carry on as formerly.

After the clergy retreat in 1951, he wrote to Father Joseph E. Campbell, the Chancellor: "I gained more from the last retreat than from some others --- I do not know why. It was also good to meet the priests."⁵¹ It was his last retreat with his fellow priests. Was that a presentiment which he failed to recognize? At the clergy retreats he was always popular with his confreres. He greeted every priest cordially and showed interest in every one's problems.

In 1952 he became afflicted with a constant pain, and in February Archbishop Pocock ordered him to come to the city for a medical examination. An operation was advised which he underwent in March.

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He never fully recovered from it. After a short convalescence in Winnipeg he returned to Sifton.

During his illness, I was privileged to fulfil the ministry in his parish in Holy Week and at Easter. He could leave his bed only for a short visit to the church on Maunday Thursday. Because he felt that his condition was deteriorating, he suggested that he go to Winnipeg with me on Easter Monday. He seemed to know that his end was near.

When we were ready to depart, he asked that I stop the car at the church. He first went into his poor rectory, then he visited the church. He remained there alone for several minutes. What thoughts crowd a priest's mind when he visits the Blessed Sacrament in his own church for the last time?

For Father Joe they must have been numerous and consoling. Did he remember on that bright warm day, how many times, in the dead of winter, clad only in a suit and a biretta, he visited the Blessed Sacrament there? Or did he recall the number of times he offered Mass at that altar? Whatever his thoughts, when he returned to the waiting car, he seemed cheerful enough. We drove off and he was never to see his church again.

By a strange coincidence, on that spring day in 1952, I was taking from Sifton at the end of his priesthood, the man who in the fall of 1939 had brought me to Sifton to begin my life as a priest.

He remained in Winnipeg only a short time, and entered the hospital at Gimli. About two weeks later, on May 2, 1952, he was taken to his eternal reward.

A rich, colorful personality had passed from the scene of life. A priest of God had completed his mission on earth. Only a few days before his death, sick as he was himself, he administered the Last Rites to a patient in the hospital. It was the last act of his priestly ministry.

That his virtues, his qualities and his work were appreciated, was attested by the large number of priests and faithful who attended his funeral at Sifton. Archbishop Pocock celebrated the Pontifical Funeral Mass, and in moving terms sympathized with the parishioners and friends of Father Kręciszewski in their great loss.

The same day, May 5, many of the parishioners of Sifton followed the remains of their pastor, which were brought to St. John Cantius Church in Winnipeg, where prayers were said in the evening.

The following morning Father Kręciszewski's body was transported to St. Mary's Cathedral, Mass was again celebrated and was followed by burial at St. Mary's Cemetery. Father J. E. Cahill, rector of the Cathedral had chosen for his friend a plot in the new priests' section of the cemetery.

To recall the years of service which Father Krę-

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ciszewski rendered to the Sifton parish, the people gratefully erected a stone monument in front of the church with the inscription:

"In Memory of the Very Reverend Ladislaus Joseph Kręciszewski, D. D., B. S. S., V. F., Our Devoted Pastor for seventeen years and Editor of Catechism by Correspondence. Born Oct. 16, 1897, Died May 2. 1952. Buried at St. Mary's Cemetery, Winnipeg."

T H E E N D



The Monument at Sifton

FOOTNOTES

1. Sixth Census of Canada, 1921; Vol. 1, page 353, 1924. Number of Poles listed: 16,594.
2. He was ordained at St. John Cantius Church, Winnipeg, on October 2, 1921, and was appointed assistant at the parish.
3. Letter of September 20, 1921. The letters referred to in this work are in the Archives of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg. They were perused when the writer was Chancellor of the Archdiocese.
4. Sister Mary Leonilla and Mary Modesta. See Father Kreciszewski's poem: To My L and M.
5. Letter of September 16, 1921.
6. Letter of October, 1921.
7. Letter of October 5, 1921.
8. Right Reverend I. E. Zielonka has been Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg since 1952.
9. *Gazeta Katolicka*, March 8, 1924. Until recently the files of the *Gazeta Katolicka* were kept at the Holy Ghost Rectory in Winnipeg. They have now been moved to the Provincial House of the Assumption Province of the Polish Oblate Fathers in Toronto.
10. See Part II, Chapter 4.
11. *Gazeta Katolicka*, May 6, 1925.
12. *Ibid.*, June 3, 1925.
13. *Ibid.*, July 8, 1925.
14. Letter of September 14, 1925.
15. Letter of November 7, 1927.
16. Letter of April 28, 1928.
17. These were not Polish Benedictine Sisters, but were from an English-speaking Congregation of Benedictine Sisters from the United States.
18. Letter of January 17, 1931.

FOOTNOTES

19. *Gazeta Katolicka*, February 11, 1931.
20. *Ibid.*, September 8, 1931; Report of the proceedings, September 16, 1931.
21. Letter of February 16, 1932.
22. *Gazeta Katolicka*, September 6, 1933.
23. *Ibid.*, January 9, 1935.
24. Letter of March 26, 1936.
25. *Gazeta Katolicka*, January 25, 1933.
26. *Duszpasterz Polski Zagranicą*, Rok VI, 1955, Kwiecień-Czerwiec, No. 2 (23), page 181.
27. Letter of June 27, 1938.
28. Letter of October 21, 1938.
29. Veritatem facientes in caritate. Ephesians, 4, 15.
30. Letter of February 26, 1951.
31. Letter of March 4, 1936.
32. Letter of October 5, 1936.
33. *Northwest Review*, June 7, 1937.
34. Year Book for Winnipeg, 1951.
35. *The Eikon*, April, 1934.
36. *Northwest Review*, February 2, 1934.
37. The Archdiocese of Winnipeg was erected on December 4, 1915.
38. The price of the book was \$ 1.00 a copy.
39. Rev. L. J. Kreciszewski, *Outline of the Life of Jesus Christ*, page 1.
40. Letter of March 28, 1949.
41. *Gazeta Katolicka*, June 27 to December 26, 1928.
42. Father Przybyłek published a series of 19 articles in the *Gazeta Katolicka* from April 20 to September 21, 1927.
43. *Gazeta Katolicka*, May 28, 1930.
44. *Ibid.*, June 11 and 18, 1939.
45. *Ibid.*, July 23 and 30, 1930.
46. *Ibid.*, September 3 and 10, 1930.
47. *Ibid.*, September 5, 1909.
48. Anniversary Number of the *Northwest Review*, 1930, page 117.
49. *Gazetae Katolicka*, May 27 and June 3, 10 and 17, 1931.
50. Some early poems which were published in the *Gazeta Katolicka*: Dream (Sen), April 28, 1908, signed OMI; A Child Talks to the Eagle (Rozmowa Dziecka z Orłem), signed W. M. Gromi, June 23, 1908; Autumn in Manitoba (Jesień w Manitobie), signed X. Jesge, October 1, 1908; Easter Alleluia by Reverend M. Jastrzębski, April 25, 1925; Verses from Canada by Stanislaus Dobrowolski, February 16, 1909.

51. **Gazeta Polska**, January 5 to August 2, 1944.
52. **Ibid.**, January 24, 1945.
53. **Ibid.**, March 21 to June 6, 1945.
54. **Tobie Ludu**, published in January, 1937 and **Ilustrowany Kwartalnik** published in 1950.
55. Letter of July 2, 1951.

so slight a man. Yet it took thirty years to break that small frame... His physical endurance was phenomenal."

Very early in his career Father Joe realized that besides spiritual care, the missions exacted physical effort. Since chapels had to be built or repaired at the least possible expense, he did most of the work himself. But he never lost sight of his vocation: the spiritual needs of his people always came first.

Neither did he overlook the social condition of his compatriots. He lost no opportunity to guide the Poles wisely and to encourage them to better their lot.

After fourteen years of moving from place to place, the little parish at Sifton finally became the base of his activities. There he deployed his talents freely. The unpretentious church became the center of his attention. There he inaugurated and developed his course of Catechism by Correspondence; there he wrote and printed. He made Sifton a favorite haunt for priests. He welcomed them all, and had a kind and encouraging word for every one.

Once Father Joe set out on his missionary life, he overcame hardships and obstacles with characteristic tenacity. Death alone stilled his busy hands and silenced his rich voice. So colorful a personality cannot cross the scene of life without tempting at least one of his admirers to arrest a bit of its simple charm.

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